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Seattle University

**VOX:**

**Explaining the Rise of the Spanish Radical Right**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Departmental Honors in International Studies

By

Lucas Christensen

June 2020

This honors thesis by Lucas Christensen is approved

Serena Cosgrove

Digitally signed by Serena  
Cosgrove  
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Abstract

In 2018 FRONTEX, the European Union's Border Control and Coast Guard Agency reported that the Western Mediterranean route, stretching from North Africa to Spain, was the most heavily used route for migrants moving from Africa to Europe. Immigrants were driven to Spain with the hope of economic mobility but found a harsh and unwelcoming society (Plann, 2019). The same year immigration increased, support for the populist radical right-wing VOX party, which has an unapologetically anti-immigration platform, also rose dramatically (Turnbull 2019). Before the increase in immigration VOX had no seats in Spanish Congress but has since become the country's third-largest political party. With the rise of the radical right in Spain, a country which has been free of anti-immigration movements since the death of fascist leader Francisco Franco, it is important to understand if and how the recent influx of large numbers of migrants from Africa have impacted Spanish voter habits and Spanish immigration politics, particularly an increase in anti-immigration sentiment. In this article I argue that although the general Spanish population has not necessarily become more supportive of restrictive policies towards immigrants, VOX's anti-immigration policy has made it to Spanish Congress by other means. Through an antipathy towards recent independence movements in Catalonia, the party has forwarded a policy of power centralization in the Spanish federal structure (Turnbull, 2019). It was the party's emphasis on Spanish territorial integrity not its anti-immigration position, that earned VOX its position as the third largest party in Spanish parliament. VOX will likely use its presence in Spanish Congress to continue to restrict Spanish borders, perpetuating the non-electoral evolution of Spanish immigration policy.

## Introduction

FRONTNEX, the European Union's Border Control and Coast Guard Agency, detected a record high of 57,034 migrations along the Western Mediterranean route between North African and Spain in 2018, more than double the number detected in 2017 (Frontex, 2019). Morocco was the main point of departure for these irregular migrants, but they originated from several states in Western and Northern Africa, including Algeria, Cameroon, and Mali (Frontex, 2019). Most of these migrants were economic migrants, hoping to find gainful employment in Western European states and to send money back home to support their families.

The same year the number of migrants entering Spain increased dramatically, support for the populist radical right-wing VOX party, which boasts an ardently anti-immigrant platform among other typical radical right-wing policies, also rose dramatically. Before the 2018 migration surge, VOX had no seats in Spanish parliament but by the beginning of 2020 VOX had become the third largest political party in the country's legislative branch. With the rise of the radical right-wing in Spain, a country which has been free of anti-immigrant right-wing movements since the death of fascist leader Francisco Franco in 1975, it is important to understand how the recent influx of large numbers of migrants from Africa have impacted Spanish voter preferences and immigration politics. This paper asks: *can the rise of VOX in Spanish politics be attributed to the increased immigration flow, or are there other factors at play?* The rise of the populist radical right-wing in other European nations has often been tied to a rise in immigration, as is the case in Northern European democracies and Italy (Rydgren, 2007). This article argues, using a demand-side theoretical framework to analyze Spanish political party success, the rise of VOX cannot be tied to the 2018 immigration surge, but rather to the Catalanian independence movement. Spain's increasingly restrictive immigration policies are not tied to a shift in public sentiment, but to external factors such as the influence of the European Union. The immigration surge has driven the ruling Socialist party to adopt an incoherent and inconsistent strategy for immigration policy, which right wing parties have attempted to use to discredit the Socialist party's competency.

The paper will proceed by first defining populist radical right-wing parties, followed by an overview of leading theories that explain how voters make decisions and how these theories have been

specifically applied to explain the rise of the radical right across European democracies. It will then explain the historical and political contexts behind the development of Spanish immigration policies, arguing that this process has never been tied to elections but rather to external pressures. It will ultimately apply demand-side theories discussed in relation to this context, bringing into account empirical studies of Spanish voter preferences, media discussing the inconsistent immigration policies of the Socialist (PSOE) leadership, and the political reactions of competing parties to this inconsistency. It will conclude by providing an alternate explanation for the rise of the far-right: the Catalanian independence movement.

## Research Methods

This paper attempts to explain two separate factors: the development of Spanish immigration policy and its relation to the rise of the far-right. In order to do this, the study contains both a historical review of the development of Spanish immigration policy and an analysis of a/the demand-side theory of electoral competition in relation to Spanish electoral politics, focusing on the “shocks” of immigration and the Catalanian independence movement. I first provide a history of Spanish immigration policies as described by research published in historical journals. After this, I explain the causes of increased immigration in terms of “push” and “pull” factors through interviews with Moroccan immigrants published in *Coming of Age in Madrid* by Susan Plann. I then provide a brief political context, looking at both the reaction of the Socialist government to immigration surges and a brief review of the Catalanian independence movement. I then synthesize the context with news media, scholarly sources, and political writings in order to support my argument that despite public opinion which generally views immigrants as a benefit to Spanish society, Spain will continue to move towards anti-immigration policies if VOX is able to gain more support through separate platforms. Additionally, I look to investigate alternative explanations for the rise of VOX. The political writing analyzed includes speeches from Spanish party leaders, manifestos published to party websites, and proposed legislation.

## Theory

Populist radical right-wing parties have become a deeply discussed topic in political science literature since these parties began to gain victories in the 1980s (Ellinas, 2007). Explanations for this phenomenon range greatly across literature, but generally political scientists have attributed this rise to many different demand-side factors from the general populous ranging from negative views towards modernization, immigration, or other changes in society. Demand-side theory focuses on the ways that shifts in voter preference can contribute to party ideology formation and electoral success. An alternative framework would attribute changes in Spanish voter behavior to changes in existing party doctrine, rather than in shifts of preference. Using this framework, understanding how voter preferences are formed will aid in understanding how party ideologies are formed and how these new political ideologies—namely right-wing populism—are able to become successful in elections.

## Definitions

The rise of populist radical right-wing parties in European democracies has given rise to a debate among scholars over how exactly to define them. Definitions of radical populist far-right parties differ across existing political science literature, but there are many common characteristics. In his 2007 article “The Sociology of the Radical Right,” Stockholm University Professor Jens Rydgren provided an in-depth analysis of this definition. The debate over what terms to use to refer to these parties is central to the search for a definition. What Rydgren (2007) referred to as the new radical right is fundamentally separate from the radical right-wing parties of World War II—the fascists, Nazis, and Francoists. In defining the parties, Rydgren incorporated the literature of many influential political scientists who have written extensively about the radical right-wing such as Cas Mudde (2007) and Hans-Georg Betz (1993). He separated his definition into the main components of radical right-wing populist parties: radical, right-wing, and populist.

When defining the term radical, Rydgren (2007) noted that there is debate among scholars of right-wing parties over whether to refer to the far-right as extremist, as Cas Mudde (2007) did, or as radical, as he chose to. Extremists, as defined by Powell (1986), argue for the “major transformation of

the society, either towards some future vision or back to an idealized past.” Rydgren (2007) believed that this definition did not fully encompass what is meant by radical right-wing, claiming that the repression of dissent and difference is another integral factor in the definition of radical in reference to radical right-wing parties. The extremism or radicalness of these right-wing parties is also evidenced in their aversion to the democratic system, whether this manifests itself in a complete rejection of or a hostility towards democratic, egalitarian values (Rydgren, 2007). Generally, when referring to political extremism or radicalness, it can be interpreted to mean values that advocate for the major transformation of society away from democracy and egalitarianism, resulting in the repression of dissent.

The next important element of the definition of the radical right is the term right itself. When he referred to the right, Rydgren (2007) took issue with depictions of the right as nonegalitarian and particularistic, especially as opposed to the left’s egalitarianism and universalism. He claimed that the political alignment of a party should not be judged merely along these lines, but along its position on sociocultural political issues. These positions relate to the values of law and order, immigration politics, abortion, and national identity, to name a few (Rydgren, 2007). The radical-right gives special attention to issues of national identity, concerning issues of ethno-pluralism—advocacy for the separation of cultural groups on the basis that it preserves their distinct cultures—and anti-immigration policies (Rydgren, 2007). The radical right is less consistent in terms of economic policy, with systems ranging from national capitalism to welfare chauvinism providing the framework for the economic policies of radical right-wing parties across Europe. In terms of rightist politics, the radical right is more focused on sociocultural issues relating to national identity than anything else.

Another important aspect of the radical right-wing is populism. Radical right-wing parties tend to see society as separated between the “corrupt” elite and the “pure” people, which Mudde (2004) argued is a fundamental aspect of populism (Rydgren 2007). What makes the new radical right different, Rydgren (2007) argued, is their inclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities in the corrupt group. When discussing their antiestablishment tendencies, the populist right wing claims that established



mainstream parties collude and focus on obsolete issues like social rights while more important issues such as immigration and a faltering economy are causing serious social strife (Rydgren, 2007). Populism itself is not found only among the radical right, but it is certainly an important characteristic of these right-wing parties.

Accounting for this discussion of defining the populist radical right wing, the VOX party appears to fit into these definitions. The party has published “100 Medidas” (2020), or measures, a sort of manifesto detailing its mission on its website. In the “100 Medidas” (2020), VOX outlines a plan to combat immigration and deport illegal immigrants currently residing within Spain and reinforcing Spanish identity and unity by combatting the rise of Islam as well as the Catalanian independence movement. In addition to these issues, VOX has also adopted an ardently anti-feminist, anti-same-sex marriage, and anti-abortion position, to name just a few of the stances they take on contemporary issues (Turnbull, 2019). The party is far more complex than being a simply anti-immigration party, but it fits squarely within the provided definition of a populist radical-right wing party.

## Median and Rational Voter Theorems

It is necessary to understand what the literature on voter behavior says about how voters change their preferences in order to grasp theories about the rise of radical right-wing groups. In 1946, Duncan Black wrote “On the Rationale of Group Decision-Making,” which posited a foundational theory of voter habits: The Median Voter Theorem (MVT). Black (1946) claimed that when voters look at a ballot of options, whether they are voting for a governor or a committee decision, they look at the options in relation to one another. Voters typically rank these options and value one over all the rest, creating a sort of single-peaked curve of personal preference, if these preferences were to be plotted on a graph—as in Figure 1 (Black, 1946). Voters will vote for whichever candidate falls closest to their own preferences. When plotted together, the candidate or motion which has the most utility for members across the entire electoral body will show a majority. Although the theory is best employed within a first-past-the-post majoritarian election system whereby a simple majority dictates a winner, it may not

function as well in a system that operates on proportional representation, in which parties are represented by the percentage of the popular vote they attained. Additionally, Black (1946) engages only with single-dimension issues—budget changes, amendments, etc. This theory does not translate well to the election of representatives or political parties, which, as in the case of VOX, normally have positions on numerous issues. Though flawed, Black’s theorem laid a framework for the voter-preference theories of many political scientists to come.

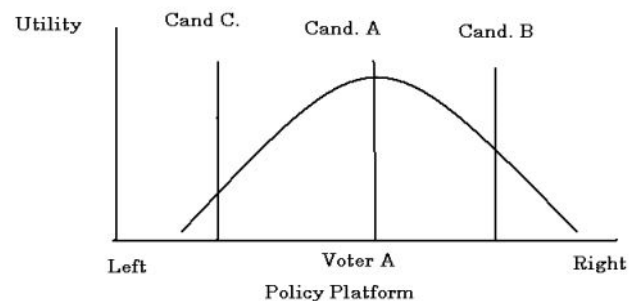


Figure 1: A graphical representation of Black’s Median Voter Theorem (Downs, 1956)

One of the most influential theorists to engage with Black’s theory was Anthony Downs. In 1957, Anthony Downs published *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, which revolutionized the study and theory of voter preference. MVT remains at the center of most discussion of voter habits, particularly regarding the rise of the populist right wing. Downs (1957) claimed that voters are in fact rational actors in regard to both their political and economic decisions—they seek out the option that will most benefit and least disadvantage themselves. Downs (1957) acknowledged the theoretical limits of this model of intensely rational individuals, but claimed that despite different moral and psychological concerns, voters will still generally vote in line with this model. It is within this rational decision-making process that voters choose the candidates and policies they support (Downs, 1957). To describe how his theory affects election outcomes, Downs (1957) acknowledged that the theory would play out differently depending upon the electoral systems and ideological distribution of the country in question, but the party that is able to represent the largest portion of the distribution of voter preference in an election will emerge successful.

Downs' (1957) rational voter theory helps explain how political parties formulate ideology. Parties will formulate their ideologies in a way they believe will gather the most votes (Downs 1957), leading to general agreement over most issues, such as health care standards and national security, what Pippa Norris (2005) referred to as valence issues. I will refer to this zone of overlap as the zone of public interest. In *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*, Norris (2005) argued that this zone of public interest is not static but shifts according to shocks in the status quo. Shocks include external events like terrorist attacks or sudden increases in immigration, major changes in government policy, or even the gradual influence of changing cultural trends (Norris, 2005). Politicians may lag behind public opinion, but policies will eventually adjust to fit within the zone of public approval (Norris, 2005). This framework of party ideology formation suggests that party ideology and policies form as a result of direct interaction with public opinion, not independent of it.

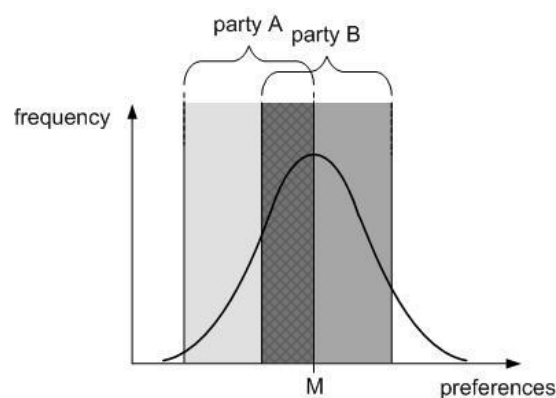


Figure 2: Party ideologies form to seek majority approval (Neumann, 2013)

## The Rise of Radical Populist Right-Wing Parties in Europe (A Demand-Side Explanation)

Since the 1980s, a significant body of political science research has been dedicated to explaining the rise of right-wing parties. Much of this literature discusses Western and Northern European far-right parties, those of Sweden, Norway, Germany and others, but the theories created are broadly applicable. Norris (2005) wrote that the rise of the radical right-wing across the world can be explained in part by social shocks that move popular sentiment to the right and have generated public approval for the

policies of the radical right. These shifts in public sentiment are often referred to as demand-side electoral factors.

Jens Rydgren (2007) gave an in-depth summary of the main theses regarding demand-side factors that explain the rise of the populist right-wing. According to Rydgren (2007), the most common demand-side theories used to explain the rise of the radical right are the “social breakdown thesis, the relative deprivation thesis, the modernization losers thesis,... the ethnic competition thesis,” and other theses that focus on the rise of popular xenophobia and general political discontent. Some theories, especially the social breakdown thesis, have lost recognition as a result of empirical research, but others remain central to theories of right-wing success. The relative deprivation and modernization losers theses are two of the most widely supported theses on the rise of the radical right. The theses both argue that the rise of the radical right is linked to significant changes in society, be they social, economic, or ethnic (Rydgren, 2007). The modernization losers thesis argues specifically that individuals who feel left behind by changes in society due to the socioeconomic and sociocultural effects of modernization are more likely to be pushed to vote for the radical right in an effort to return society to a point in history when they believed they benefitted (Rydgren, 2007). Another thesis, ethnic competition, links increased success of radical right-wing parties directly to immigration (Rydgren, 2007). This thesis claims that immigration causes increased anxiety among voters about access to economic opportunities as a result of increased immigration, causing voters to vote for right-wing parties (Rydgren, 2007). This thesis has had support from the political science community as a result of empirical research in the cases of Denmark and the Netherlands, though research in other states—namely France, Austria, and Germany—has not so clearly supported it (Rydgren, 2007). Rydgren also referred to popular xenophobia as a possible explanation, arguing that the link between the radical right and immigration may not be as a result of economic anxieties, but general xenophobia.

Norris (2005) questioned the simplification of the issue of right-wing success into terms of ethnic competition and immigration, arguing that the real cause of the cultural and economic shocks which move public sentiment towards the radical right is not immigration, but globalization.

Immigration is an important factor of globalization, Norris (2005) argued, but does not encompass the full answer. Norris (2005) expanded on this, arguing that radical right-wing parties have been able to adjust to shifts in public opinion as a reaction to globalization more smoothly than other mainstream parties. We can encompass Norris' (2005) and Rydgren's (2007) descriptions of ethnic competition and modernization losers theories into a broader theory called globalization loser theory. This theory claims that the effects of globalization, specifically the economic and cultural effects it can have on a population through immigration has led individuals to show increased support for the radical right.

Scholars tend to agree that explanations for the rise of the radical right wing differ state to state. Some countries see a rise in the far right due to the adverse effects of modernization on their citizens while some see it as a direct result of increased immigration and ethnic diversity. As discussed in the Definitions section, right wing parties typically advocate for the return of society to some idealized past, or to some future vision. This would help to explain one thing that these theories have in common. They look to some cultural or economic shift to explain why support for the radical right-wing has historically gained successes. Typically, this shift comes in the form of globalization or an increase in immigration, but it can look different from that as well. This cultural protectionism, as I show below, can account for the rise of the radical right wing in Spanish politics, though not necessarily as a link to immigration.

## Context

### Spanish Electoral History

After 36 years in power, fascist leader Francisco Franco died in 1975, leaving the government in the hands of the Spanish parliament, the Cortes Generales, who organized the new Spanish Constitution which was ratified by referendum in 1978 (Lansford, 2019). Electoral politics have evolved significantly since 1978, but mainstream politics has remained dominated by the Partido Popular (PP), Spain's main conservative party, and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), Spain's main liberal party. Control

of the government has oscillated between these parties since 1978 (Lansford, 2019). Other parties that have gained power and recognition are regionalist parties, vying for greater autonomy for Spain's autonomous communities, particularly in Catalonia to the east, the Basque country to the north, and Galicia to the West (Lansford, 2019). These regionalist parties have widely ranging beliefs, but generally support greater autonomy within the Spanish federal system. Some parties, especially in the Basque Country and Catalonia, desire full independence. Regionalist parties have also sometimes been associated with terrorist activity as in the case of the Basque Country (Lansford, 2019). As mentioned earlier, it was not until 2018 that a radical right-wing party has been able to become successful within Spanish elections. Spain's legislature is filled with a diverse array of political parties, representing a wide range of ideals. Both chambers of parliament are dominated by the PSOE, followed by the PP, then VOX. The remainder of parties in Spanish legislature is a range of regionalist groups.

## Development of Spanish Immigration Policy

Studies that focus on the history and development of Spanish immigration typically begin their analysis after the drafting and approval of the Spanish Constitution in 1978. In a 2017 study on the development of immigration and policies towards immigration in Spain, Nancy Wonders claimed that Spanish immigration has been influenced by local, national, and global influences individually and interdependently. Despite the Spanish people's consistently positive views towards immigration, the Spanish government's approach to immigration has grown increasingly restrictive since the 1980s.

At a national level, Wonders (2017) focused on the development of a stratified labor system reliant on immigration to sustain growth. Both Wonders (2017) and David Moffette (2014) discussed this influence on Spanish immigration policy. The immigrant-reliant labor system was able to develop due to the lack of any immigration laws until 1985, which made it easier for would-be immigrants to enter the country as tourists and to simply overstay their visas (Wonders 2017). Due in part to this increase in irregular immigration, the Spanish economy experienced a 20-year-long boom (Wonders, 2017).

Moffette (2014) argued that the government's lack of limitations on immigration was an intentional policy intended to facilitate the entry of migrant workers to bolster the Spanish economy. This irregular immigration encouraged more Latin American 'tourists' to enter the country and overstay their tourist visas to begin working in Spain (Moffette, 2014). This gave control over the demographics of immigration to the government, who filtered out undesirable immigrants—typically Moroccans and other Africans—through arrests and deportations and regularized those deemed deserving—typically Latin Americans (Moffette, 2014). Moffette (2014) and Wonders (2017) both point to the fact that regularizations were carried out under both left and right-leaning political parties "...and reflected the recognition that immigrants were key drivers of Spain's economic growth" (Wonders, 2017). This recognition is reflected in public opinion towards immigrants and their effect on the economy, which has been overwhelmingly positive (Moffette, 2014). After the recluse Francoist government collapsed in the wake of Franco's death in 1985, immigrants became an integral part of the development of the Spanish economy and identity.

Wonders (2017) pointed mainly to the expansion of the European Union's influence over Spanish immigration policies and its impacts on the tightening of external borders to account for global influences on Spanish immigration policies. The Spanish government joined the European Union in 1986. Membership to the European Union and the Schengen Agreement, through which European states have "agreed to a unified migration policy that liberalizes international travel within the Schengen Area while establishing restrictions on migration from nationals outside of the Area," has profoundly shaped Spain's approach to dealing with immigration since entering the EU (Wonders, 2017). Before joining the European Union, Spain unofficially supported irregular immigration as discussed earlier, but membership required the government to impose stricter limitations on its immigration practices (Wonders, 2017). Spain's 1986 immigration law, which allowed for the state's entry into the European Union, was created in order to set a divide between those in the state legally and those there without explicit legal permissions, a concept which had not existed in Spanish immigration law prior to its membership to the European Union (Wonders, 2017). The passage of laws clarifying a legal difference

between legal and illegal immigrants led to the need to impose stricter regulations on migrant workers, and the country began to issue the regularizations discussed earlier on a broader scale (Moffette, 2014). Luna Vives (2017) also discussed European Union bordering practices and their influences on Spanish immigration policies, focusing on the strategies employed after 2005 in order to keep immigrants from outside of the European Union out of Europe. These strategies have included cooperation with Morocco to send irregular migrants back, the solidification and militarization of Spanish borders, and policies meant to keep African migrants in their countries, proactively preventing their eventual arrival to European Union countries (Vives, 2017). As the European Union's influence on Spanish immigration policy has increased, Spain has been forced to give up some of its sovereignty over these issues and has instead been compelled to align its policies with those of the European Union.

At the local level, Wonders (2017) looks to citizens and Spanish civil society. Wonders (2017) acknowledged that Spanish immigration policies are primarily influenced by economic and international pressures, but she also attributed some influences to ordinary Spanish people. Spain's central government is relatively weak, and grants significant power to the 17 autonomous regions, causing a significant amount of governance in Spain to occur at the local and regional level. The VOX party gained its first electoral successes at the regional level within Andalucía in the midst of increased immigration to the region in 2018 for example, suggesting that support for the party began on a small, regional scale in Southern Spain (Turnbull, 2018). Wonders' article cited a PEW poll taken in 2015 which showed that despite the 2008 global economic downturn and increasingly anti-immigrant media coverage, xenophobia was not rising among the general Spanish population (2017). Even while Spain was enacting stricter and stricter bordering practices and encouraging migrants to return to their countries of origin, few actually did (Wonders, 2017). Wonders claimed that this refusal to return home could have been evidence of the depth of their integration into Spanish culture. The fact that immigrants are able to comfortably integrate into Spanish society despite increasingly hostile media coverage and restrictive immigration policies from the government shows that on a small-scale, Spanish popular opinion is not necessarily rising in response to immigration surges.



## Factors Explaining Immigration Flows from West and North Africa to Spain

This section will examine some “push” factors driving migrants out from West and North African countries and some “pull” factors that are pushing migrants towards Spain in particular. Push factors are those factors which drive individuals from their homes, that convince them to pack up their belongings and search for a new home, while pull factors are those that lead them to choose a certain location as their new home. This section will focus on North and West African migrants into Spain, as the vast majority of immigrants in the 2018 surge came from these areas. Susan Plann (2019) discusses the pushes and pulls driving immigration across the Western Mediterranean Route in her book *Coming of Age in Madrid*, in which she interviewed a number of Moroccan economic immigrants.

### Push Factors

In describing the push factors driving Moroccan individuals to leave their families behind, Plann (2019) looked to both Spanish officials, who assured her “that this was economic migration, motivated by the desire to help needy families left behind.” When she interviewed Moroccan immigrants, most of them did cite economic factors as a main reason, but also discussed social and familial factors as well (Plann, 2019). Certain immigrants wanted to send money back to their parents or siblings because their families did not have enough money, but others also wanted new opportunities and experiences, feeling that upward mobility for themselves was lacking in Moroccan society (Plann, 2019). While many of the reasons immigrants gave for their decision to leave Morocco were linked to money, their motivations were far more complex than simple economic migration.

### Pull Factors

Plann (2019) also discussed the pull factors that made Spain an appealing location for African migrants. She claimed that there was significant misinformation in the African community about the lives of Europeans and of the Africans who had emigrated from their homes in search of a better life. Portrayed through Spanish and European television and other forms of mass media, Africans associated

the lives of Europeans “...with their image of abundance and prosperity” (Plann, 2019). Another source of misinformation was the lifestyle of the tourists who came to Africa and lived lavish lifestyles (Plann, 2019). Moroccans were shocked by the amount of food purchased, the European’s ability to afford cars, and other luxuries that European tourists are afforded in Morocco (Plann, 2019). As a result of this image of Spanish life as luxurious, laid-back, and lavish, Moroccans aspired to leave their country and move to Spain to experience the same lifestyle.

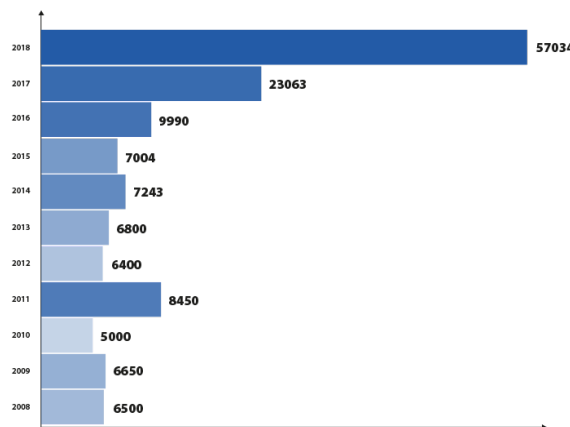


Figure 3: Frontex figures on immigrants entering across the Western Mediterranean Route

## Policies After the 2018 Immigration Surge

During the 2018 immigration surge, which began in early summer of that year, Spanish immigration policy fluctuated significantly. This fluctuation was recorded in depth in Spanish news media, specifically in the newspapers *El Pais* and *El Mundo*. In August 2018, *El Pais* published an article titled “Spain will Not Accept NGO Ship ‘Aquarius,’ Which is Carrying 141 rescued migrants,” that detailed the socialist government’s treatment of a vessel called the Aquarius that had rescued 141 migrants attempting to make the journey from Africa to Spain. Months earlier, Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez had allowed the same ship to dock in Valencia and the 630 migrants on board the ship at the time to enter Spain (Pacho, 2018). Spain allowed numerous ships to enter their ports, as well as numerous land border crossings from Morocco into Spanish cities on the northern coast of Africa (Pacho, 2018). In order to manage the growing immigration numbers, the Spanish government asked

the European Commission for new funds (Pacho, 2018). Soon after, the Spanish government began denying entry to immigrants, denying the same ship which they had accepted a few months earlier, Aquarius, refuge in Spanish harbors (Gortazar, 2018). Spanish Socialist leadership has been the subject of intense scrutiny and criticism due to its inconsistent actions concerning immigration. The Italian foreign minister Matteo Salvini, who notoriously closed off Italian borders to all NGO ships, was intensely critical of the Spanish government's handling of the issue, calling them "out-of-control" (Pacho, 2018). Notably, increased immigration is often cited as a reason for Italy's recent turn to the populist radical right, a movement spearheaded by Salvini (Coman, 2018). The inconsistent response to the immigration surge was likely the result of a lack of support from the EU and other states, but regardless the policies have resulted in a statewide restriction on immigration. As a result of Spain's increased isolation, numerous migrants began jumping Spain's border fences with Morocco at both Ceuta and Melilla, two Spanish enclaves on the Northern coast of Morocco, and engaging violently with border control guards in order to gain access into Spain (Canas, 2019). These migrants were arrested and deported back to Morocco (Canas, 2019). Due to the Socialist government's lack of control over the borders, both the Partido Popular, Spain's main conservative party, and the VOX party have attempted to show themselves as competent alternatives.

## Analysis

This paper applies demand-side theory, specifically the globalization loser theory discussed earlier, of voter behavior and party ideology formation to better understand how the populist radical right-wing VOX party has garnered such widespread support become successful in Spanish elections. A radical offshoot from the country's mainstream conservative political party, Partido Popular, VOX has quickly become the third most powerful political party in an increasingly unstable democracy. I have shown that as a result of factors outside of Spanish elections, the Spanish government has become increasingly restrictive of immigration. Spain's economy boomed as a result of the immigration it promoted from the late 1980s until the mid-2000s, when the global financial crisis led to instability, but the European Union's Schengen Agreement led to increasingly restrictive border policies (Wonders,

2017). In this article I also argue that these new anti-immigrant border policies are not reflective of a shift in Spanish popular opinion. Though there has been a shift in public opinion towards the right, immigration policies have evolved independently of the context of elections. The rise of the far-right can be explained by other factors within Spanish politics—mainly by threats to the state’s political and cultural unity. As a result of this overall political shift to the right, however, the government could be expected to continue to adopt increasingly restrictive immigration policies.

## Immigration as an Electoral Issue

To look at how immigration has influenced Spanish elections, one must understand how immigration becomes an electoral issue. Morales (2015) analyzed this issue from a demand-side framework before the VOX party was significant, but the arguments made in her research are still relevant 5 years later. Morales (2015) argued that Spain is somewhat anomalous regarding the treatment of immigration as an electoral issue. There are three different ways, according to Morales (2015), that immigration enters the electoral process: through environmental factors or shocks such as economic crises and immigration surges (when views of immigrants tend to deteriorate), through party ideals, or through party competition over issue competency. Since 2015, when Morales wrote her research, two of the three categories that she argued were irrelevant have become more notable in Spain: environmental shocks and party ideals. Morales argued that there were no significant parties that ran on an explicitly anti-immigration platform in Spain, but that has changed with the rise of the VOX party. Morales also wrote outside of the context of the 2018 immigration surge, a shock which could have turned public opinion to support an anti-immigration alternative. Morales (2015) also argued that party competition was relevant to Spanish elections, as voters have identified that immigration holds an increasingly relevant place in their decisions. Since 2000, when the European Union started pressuring the Spanish government to adopt anti-immigration policies and immigration became a relevant electoral issue, Spanish political parties have competed for competency over immigration issues.

Taking Morales' framework into account and looking specifically at the current Spanish political climate, immigration has clearly become an important element in Spanish elections. Both the Partido Popular and the VOX party have responded to Socialist inconsistencies in immigration policy with a goal of claiming competency over immigration. In both Partido Popular and VOX press releases and manifestos, the Socialist mishandling of the 2018 immigration surge has been addressed. Partido Popular officials have argued that "Sanchism [referencing the immigration policies of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez] ... uses immigrants to win votes." (Alvarez, 2019), criticizing the "continuous changes of course in the decisions of the socialist executive," citing the acceptance of the Aquarius ship, the destruction of barbed wire fences in Ceuta and Melilla, and the deportation of illegal immigrants as intensely contrasting policies (Acedo, 2019). VOX officials have also used the socialist executive's inconsistent policies to claim competency over immigration issues. They have promised to build a border wall with Morocco that will be heavily patrolled in an effort to limit land based illegal immigration, to favor controlled immigration of refugees from Latin America over Africa and the Middle East, and to deport all undocumented immigrants currently living in Spain ("100 Medidas," 2020). They have also been critical of the current administration's inconsistent policies.

Morales (2015) also claimed that neither environmental nor ideological factors regarding immigration factor into Spanish elections. This is no longer true. Spain now has a strong anti-immigration party involved in its elections, and it experienced a significant immigration spike in 2018 that had the potential to change the course of Spanish elections. Morales (2015) acknowledged that the 2007 financial crisis had the opportunity to affect Spanish popular opinion towards immigration, driving them towards increasingly isolationist and xenophobic policies, but that this shift did not actually occur. As a result, there appears to be a cultural difference that leads the Spanish people to support immigration, even in the face of environmental shocks. Polls have shown that this pro-immigration stance has continued through the 2018 immigration surge and that Spain remains "exceptional" in the sense that its citizens still generally have favorable views of immigrants (Turnbull, 2019). The addition of an ardently anti-immigration party has also shifted public opinion, focusing it more on anti-immigration

policies. Despite increased support for the VOX Party, the Spanish public remains mostly supportive of or at least ambivalent towards immigrants, so it is clear that there must be another shock contributing to the success of the VOX party.

## Another Explanation: The Catalan Independence Movement

Some scholars have attributed the rise of the VOX party in Spain to its emphasis on the territorial integrity of the central state government in the face of rising sentiment for Catalanian independence or at least greater Catalanian autonomy within the Spanish state. Stuart Turnbull (2019) conducted a survey after VOX gained its first successes in the 2018 Andalusian elections, a former PSOE stronghold, to discover what shift in public sentiment caused this shift in voter preference. Through his research, he found a statistically significant correlation between voters that supported VOX and a concern for the rising Catalan separatist movement (Turnbull, 2019). In the framework of demand-side theories concerning the rise of populist right-wing parties, these results fit but also show that the Spanish situation remains distinct.

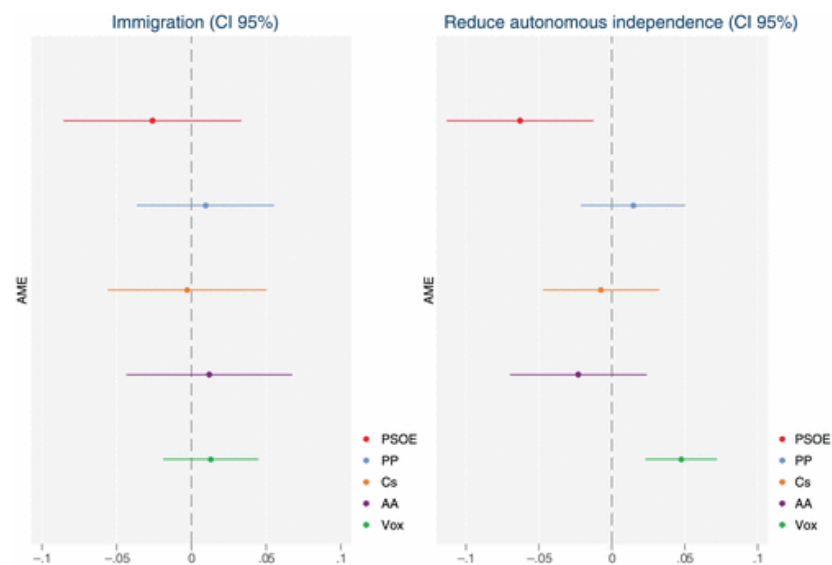


Figure 4: Results of Turnbull's surveys of Andalusian voters, showing a significant correlation between concern for autonomous independence and voters for VOX (2019)

The “shock” that shifted public opinion in this case was the Catalan independence movement rather than immigration. The independence movement has shifted a significant segment of the Spanish

public—especially in autonomous communities with little autonomy such as Andalusia—towards support of a stronger, more centralized national government, another central issue in the VOX manifesto (Turnbull, 2019). In recent years, nationalist Catalonians have moved to support declaring independence from the Spanish state, an issue which has been particularly divisive in Spanish politics (Turnbull, 2019). In 2017, Catalonians voted in a referendum asking whether or not the Catalanian people would support secession. The vote turned out to be overwhelmingly in favor of secession, though it is possible that this can be accredited to the fact that many who opposed the movement rejected the vote's legitimacy. Many individuals who had previously not voted for VOX shifted their votes to the party, acknowledging its' hardline centralist position on political power in the Spanish government.

Notably, Turnbull (2019) found little statistical support for an increase in support for anti-immigrant policies. This research shows that although immigration itself is not necessarily a concern for most voters who have shifted their support to VOX, voters have become more concerned about issues other than the protection of immigration. The concern among Spanish citizens in the 2018 elections that put VOX into power was a concern for cultural protectionism and fear of change, though not due to a fear of the cultural effects of immigration, but rather a fear of the cultural effects of greater Catalanian autonomy. As a result of this concern for protecting Spanish culture, VOX has been empowered in the Spanish government, and the government's immigration policy could be influenced by their pressure as they continue to gain influence. The immigration surge itself may not be to credit for VOX's electoral success, but the Catalanian independence movement has created support to a group that will continue to restrict immigration to a country whose citizens generally approve of immigrants.

## Conclusion

This paper has analyzed demand-side factors explaining voter habit shifts in Spain towards the populist radical right-wing VOX party, arguing that the increased immigration flow in 2018 did not directly contribute to the electoral successes of the party. In the context of both increasingly vocal independence movements and increasing immigration, citizens' concern with retaining the territorial integrity of the Spanish nation has far outweighed their concern for protecting the rights of immigrants. As I have shown in this article, Spain's immigration policy evolved mostly independent of the electoral process. Earlier policies focused on the importation of labor for the sake of expanding the economy until 2000, when the European Union's influence over Spanish immigration policy began to lead the government to impose relatively hard borders. The Socialist government's indecisive and incoherent response to the 2018 immigration surge has continued this pattern, leading to the party's loss of competency over immigration issues. Non-electoral factors will continue to influence Spanish immigration policy. With the rise of the far-right in Spain as a response to territorial independence movements, this trend of gradual border restriction will continue. Despite Spain's "exceptional" status as an egalitarian community accepting of immigrants and cultural diversity, Spain has given power and a voice to a populist radical right-wing party and could restrict the rights of the immigrants its people are so accepting of. This situation is still developing and will require constant documentation and research in order to be fully understood. Additionally, in order to gather a more holistic understanding of the interaction of Spanish identity and support for the far-right, an analysis of Franco's influence on Spanish identity would be helpful. In the future, I would also look at proposed legislation of the VOX party regarding immigration in order to understand how they will influence the further development of Spanish immigration policies and further analyze the involvement of the European Union in influencing Spanish immigration policy.

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